Diversity Leadership Guide

Generations in the Workplace

Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

Walk into any large retailer today and you'll notice something. You may be greeted by an employee well into his or her 60s. You may see warehousing staff in their early 20s and be checked out by cashiers in their 30s or 40s. There is no such thing as the "average" worker anymore.

Managing and motivating this diverse workforce has become a serious challenge. One size does not fit all. The manager's way of thinking may not always apply to his or her employees. What's a company to do? You have to pay attention to generational differences. Read on for a better understanding of the four generational groups attitudes towards work, money and life—Matures, Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials.

Matures—The Senior Members of Today's Workforce

People born prior to 1946 are classified as "Matures" in generational workplace studies. The older members of this group lived through the Great Depression. Even those born after the Depression were raised by parents who remembered it, and that affected their attitudes about life.

Many of them remember World War II first hand. They are patriotic and believe in "fighting the good fight." They are loyal but not blindly loyal—they'll shop around if they feel they've been treated poorly.

The educational system when Matures were young was strict and regimented. There was little room for self-expression. They learned to play by the rules and respect authority. They married young, and the men were expected to take responsibility for providing for the family while the women managed the home and raised the children. Expectations were clear, and being responsible citizens was paramount.

"Matures were brought up to produce quality work day in and day out, not as an exception," says Cam Marston, author and speaker on generational issues in the workplace. "They did what they needed to do to get the job done and took pride in their work."

Advancement was based primarily on seniority. Because the Matures were brought up to respect their elders and people in authority, the "boss" received a double dose of respect.

Matures in today's workforce see a very different system from that of their youth. Seniority isn't the most important aspect for Boomers, Xers or Millennials. If the Mature is the manager, he may consider the younger generations impulsive, disrespectful or even lazy. It's obvious that such an attitude toward employees would make managing them more difficult. Additionally, younger employees may feel that the Mature manager doesn't understand today's world and what it takes to get ahead. There is a disconnect.

The key to working with people of a different generation is to recognize that they are different and not expect them to come around to your way of thinking. Each generation has its own context, and managers must learn to speak to that context for each individual.

Matures

If you're managing Matures, understand their need for respect and structure. They generally want to know what you need them to do so that they can do it well. Quality is priority one.

If you're a Mature manager begin to understand the context of your employees. As hard as it may be for you to relate to their way of thinking, you must accept that it is the way they think and adapt your management style to it. Put yourself in their shoes, understand their context, and you'll find managing them much easier.

> "Generational diversity is just another dimension of diversity that companies came to a little bit later than race and gender. So it was just a natural evolution of the diversity conversation."
>
> *Jennifer Allyn,* PricewaterhouseCoopers

Baby Boomers: They're the Vast Majority of Bosses Today

Born between 1946 and 1964, Baby Boomers are the post-World War II generation.

This group was brought up in a time of economic prosperity when opportunities abounded for anyone willing to work hard to get ahead. The basis of the Baby Boomers' world is that long hours and sacrifice are the foundation of success. Hard work is measured in terms of working long hours.

"Work is a large part of the Boomer's personal identity," says Cam Martson. "Baby Boomers introduce themselves with their name and where they work. It's an important part of who they are." Boomers are competitive. They fight to get ahead and believe in personal development as an important component of that struggle. Unlike the Matures, they don't see seniority as the primary factor in advancement. They see commitment, dedication, hard work and loyalty to the company as primary factors. They generally like to see visible and tangible rewards for their work. Money may also be a key motivator, because they grew up in a time of serious "consumerism." The Boomer generation also includes many women in the workforce, not just in a "job" but in a career.

Issues began to surface as both husbands and wives worked outside the home and shared responsibility for childcare and household responsibilities. The pressure to juggle responsibilities and do it all well helped to define the Boomers.

Boomers have lived through a number of technological advances in their careers. The widespread use of computers and the global access they provide changed many jobs substantially.

Then entry of Xers and Millennials (who had grown up using computers) into the workforce put many Boomers in a position of being at a technological disadvantage—a difficult spot for the competitive Boomer types.

As managers, Boomers expect their employees to have the same sense of dedication and loyalty. The company's needs come before the employee's needs in their context. Working late, coming in early, forgoing vacation or sacrificing weekends is just part of the deal. It's how you advance if you're serous about your job.

Work-life balance issues entered the picture much later in the Boomers' careers. They sometimes recall their own "juggling" experiences and wonder why the younger generations can't handle that as well. "Where was work-life balances when I was raising my kids" they may ask. Boomers also tend to use money as a motivator, with less than the desired result when applied to Xers and Millennials. "Having it all" isn't as important to the younger generations as "having time to enjoy it." Boomer managers need to recognize this change of focus and be willing to reward employees differently.

To better deal with their Boomer bosses, members of Generation X and the Millennial generation should remember that Boomers sometimes see confidence as arrogance and may be looking for more respect from the younger people they supervise.

Tendencies of workers from the four generations				
	Matures	**Baby Boomers**	**Generation X**	**Millennials**
Birth years	Before 1945	1946 - 1964	1965 - 1978	1979 - 2000
Business focus	Quality	Long hours	Productivity	Contribution
Motivator	Security	Money	Time off	Time off
Company loyalty	Highest	High	Low	Low
Money is	Livelihood	Status symbol	Means to an end	Today's payoff
Value	Family/Community	Success	Time	Individuality

Generation X: It's productivity, not hours that counts

Generation X (or Xers) were born between 1965 and 1978. The world they grew up in was much different from that of their parents. They watched the Vietnam War on television. They saw protests against the government and the war. They experienced a declining economy and saw their parents get laid off from jobs they'd held for years. The promise of hard work, a comfortable lifestyle and a gold watch was a thing of the past. Where Boomers were encouraged to get a job and make a good living, Xers were encouraged to find a job they enjoyed. They have the attitude "If I don't like this job, I'll go get another one," and that's what they do. Loyalty to a company is a thing of the past. If the Xers are loyal, they are loyal to a manager, not a company. Xers believe productivity should be a determinant for success, not the number of hours an employee spends in the office. They want to be judged by output, not "face time." Even money isn't a particularly good motivator for most Xers. Given the choice between a bonus and additional time off, many Xers will choose time off. Xers grew up with ever-changing technology. They are comfortable with the concept and understand the necessity of keeping up with the latest. They expect their employers to provide continual training to help them stay on the cutting edge. Skill and knowledge acquisition is of primary importance. Members of this generation do not expect to be with the same company for many years, even if they like their current jobs. They've grown up seeing how quickly the world can change, so they expect their lives to change as well. They want to be competitive as a potential employee because they know at some point, their career will depend on it. Xers believe in function over form. From casual dress in business to virtual offices, the Xers have had a tremendous impact on the world of work. They believe the 40-hour workweek is a throw-back from a previous era. They want to be rewarded for what they produce, regardless of where they are when they produce it or how long it takes. If they show their Boomer bosses that they are capable of doing high quality work in shorter hours, Xers may succeed in winning them over. Managing this group requires attention to them as individuals, recognition of their learning goals and a focus on productivity. Look for their work ideals to continue to change the world as Boomers age out and Xers take over.

"You can't stereotype an entire group but, certainly, there is evidence that there are trends that are very different in terms of the attitudes toward work and outside of work."

Lois Rubin, Unilever Foods

Millennials: They bore easily - Keep them motivated

Sometimes called "Generation Y" or the "Echo Boomers," these individuals were born between 1979 and 2000. The earlier Millennials are the newest members of our workforce and are often the children of the Baby Boomers. They represent a large number of our population, outpacing the Xers by upwards of 30 million people, according to government census statistics. Many of these workers grew up in dual-working households, so they became independent at an early age. They have been exposed to all the trappings of a technologically advanced society and recognize that they are citizens of the world, not just their city, state or country. The whole world is open to them, so they often have lofty ambitions. They often, though, don't have a plan for achieving them. Millennials, like Generation Xers, tend to be very

"me" focused. Being happy is more important than being successful by someone else's definition. "They see their jobs as a means of earning an income TODAY, not as a calling or devotion," says Cam Marston, author and speaker on generational workplace issues. They do, however, want to feel that their jobs have meaning. They want to know how what they do affects the bigger picture and benefits society. Climbing the corporate ladder for its own sake doesn't appeal to the Millennials, but staying challenged does. It is critical for employers to engage these workers in the company's mission and help them understand where their contributions fit in the overall scheme of things.

Millennials have grown up multi-tasking – their schedules as children were often more demanding than their parents'

schedules. They are easily bored and have minimal loyalty, so keeping them in your company requires that you keep them motivated and busy. They also tend to be entrepreneurial, so give them opportunities to plan, build and experiment with new methods. Studies predict that there will be a serious shortage of workers by 2006. Because of the vast numbers of Millennials in the workforce, getting and keeping them will be critical to a company's success. Though managing them may be a challenge, not managing them effectively could be a disaster. As with the other groups, the key to managing Millennials is to understand their context and respond to it. Don't expect them to become Boomers or Matures. They won't be. Engage them, give them consistent feedback and direction, take advantage of their energy levels and entrepreneurial attitudes, and watch them blossom.

Ideas for Dialogue

1. If you are a Mature or Baby Boomer or know any, how accurate do you find this information? Likewise, if you are a GenXer or Millennial, what is the accuracy of this information?

2. What are some of the positive aspects of each described work ethic? What do you consider drawbacks?

3. Do you have any pointers on working successfully with people in each of these generations?

4. Have you experienced any generational issues at work? If so, can you share any?

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